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"Physicians-Human and Divine"



A Sermon

PREACHED BY THE

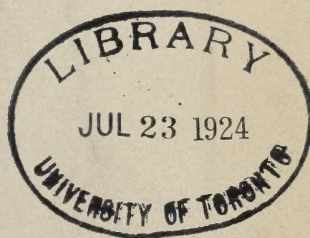
Reverend Claris Edwin Silcox

IN THE

First Church of Christ

Fairfield, Conn.

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HYMN

"Thine arm, O Lord, in days of old,
Was strong to heal and save;
It triumphed o'er disease and death,
O'er darkness and the grave:
To Thee they went, the blind, the dumb,
The palsied and the lame,
The leper with his tainted life,
The sick with fevered frame.

"And lo, Thy touch brought life and health,
Gave speech, and strength, and sight;
And youth renewed, and frenzy calmed,
Owned Thee, the Lord of Light.
And now, O Lord, be near to bless,
Almighty as of yore,
In crowded streets, by restless couch,
As by Gennesareth's shore.

"Be thou our great Deliverer still,
Thou Lord of life and death;
Restore and quicken, soothe and bless
With Thine almighty breath.
To hands that work and eyes that see
Give wisdom's heavenly lore,
That whole and sick, and weak and strong,
May praise Thee evermore."

—Edward Hayes Plumtre, 1866

“PHYSICIANS—HUMAN AND DIVINE”

Text:—“Give place to the physician, for the Lord hath created him; let him not go from thee, for thou hast need of him. There is a time when in their hands there is good success. For they shall also pray unto the Lord, that he would prosper that, which they give for ease and remedy to prolong life.”—Ecclesiasticus 38:12-14.

On the whole the Bible does not seem to place much confidence in the healing powers of the physicians of the time. Thus it is related with humor which is sardonic if intentional, that Asa the King took sick and having consulted the physicians was gathered to his fathers. Then, again, there is that well-known and classic instance in the gospel, related by none less than St. Luke who was himself a physician, concerning the poor woman who came to Jesus for help since she had for twelve years spent all her living upon the physicians and was healed of none. But when we consider the limited knowledge of medicine at this time and the indubitable quackery of many of the would-be healers, we need not wonder at the biblical attitude. Of anatomy, little or nothing was known, since the laws governing ceremonial purity prohibited the touching of dead bodies. The number of herbs whose healing properties were understood were few indeed, and the remedies prescribed even in the enlightened days of the Empire raised more problems than they solved. Thus, as a cure for hydrophobia, Gallian recommended the eyes of crabs, while Pliny the Elder advised the victim to eat the liver of the dog who had done the harm, provided, I presume, that the animal

could be caught. Indeed, any one who reads the reports of our medical missionaries in China or Africa, and know the strange and terrible devices of the native medicine-man can understand how the writers of the Bible viewed the matter.

But in the chapter from the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus which we read this morning for our Old Testament Lesson, there is one fitting tribute to the efforts of the physicians. "Honour a physician with the honour due unto him for the uses which ye may have of him; for the Lord hath created him. For of the most High cometh healing, and he shall receive honour of the King. The skill of the physician shall lift up his head; and in the sight of great men he shall be in admiration. The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth; and he that is wise will not abhor them. . . . Give place to the physician for the Lord hath created him; let him not go from thee, for thou hast need of him. There is a time when in their hands there is good success. For they shall also pray unto the Lord that he would prosper that which they give for ease and remedy to prolong life." One indeed would welcome the commentary of some of the faith-healers on this passage! And if it was in any degree true of conditions in Judaea or Egypt two thousand years ago, how much more fervently can this praise of physicians be pronounced today when the race has been enriched with so many wonderful discoveries in medicine and surgery.

In his novel entitled "The Doctor's Christmas Eve", James Lane Allen has given us a picture of the library of a Kentucky physician. And on the walls of this library, there was a series of five paintings which the doctor called "The World's Path of Lessening Pain". They represented five great epochs in

the history of medicine. The first was a scene from the life of primitive man. It was a battle picture; the dead and wounded are lying on the field. The wounded are dragging themselves to a nearby stream of running water and there are seeking to cool and cleanse their wounds in the stream. This, says Mr. Allen, must have been one of the first steps in the progress of medicine—the endeavor to substitute water for saliva as a cleansing agent.

And the second picture is also a battle picture. Here mankind has learned to bring together fire and fat, and to produce oil, and to pour the boiling oil into the wounds or in some similar way through the application of heat to cauterize them. He has learned the healing and cleansing power of heat

And the third picture is another battle-field—this time in Piedmont. Once again the wounded cover the field, and on one side is a mass of masonry which serves as an operating table. Upon the table lies a man whose leg has just been amputated. And on either side of the patient stands another man. One, holding a cautery from a nearby brazier, stands for the past; the other is a poor barber's apprentice, a despised Huguenot but the father of modern surgery, and in his hand is a simple ligature. It is the figure of Ambroise Pare.

The next picture takes us down to the nineteenth century, to a rude house in Kentucky. It is the house of Ephraim MacDowell, the country doctor. He stands at the front door to greet a woman who has just ridden some seventy miles through the wilderness to seek the doctor's help. He is assisting her to alight from her horse; "and he is soon to perform, without consultation, without precedent in the ages of surgery (but not without a prayer for himself and for her),

by strength of his own will and by the light of the solitary candle of his own genius, an operation which made Kentucky the mother of ovarian surgery for all coming time—a new epoch of life and mercy.’’*

The fifth and last picture is a scene laid in Boston in 1846. And in the operating room stands a doctor making for the world the first merciful use of anaesthetics. It is Morton whose monument one may find for himself on Boston common, in many ways the most noteworthy of all the noted monuments on that historic ground. And what a difference has been made in the whole realm of surgery by the knowledge of ether and chloroform!

This series of pictures was called “The World’s Path of Lessening Pain.” We could add several more wonderful pictures to the gallery and bring the Progress of Medicine down to our own day. But what a story it is, from the times of Galen and Hippocrates down to those of Harvey, or Edward Jenner, or MacDowell or Louis Pasteur, or Lord Lister, or Roentgen, or Alexis Carrell, or the Mayo Brothers. Read, if you will, Sir William Osler’s Yale Lectures on “The Evolution of Modern Medicine” and then follow the advice of the author of Ecclesiasticus and honour the physician with the honour which is due unto him, for there are times when in his hands there is good success.

One of the most noteworthy charities in any city is the Hospital. It would be well if everybody could go through such an institution as the Bridgeport Hospital, and see what an immense plant is required to-day in the ministry of healing. One should not forget to visit the laundry, and the store-rooms, and the kit-

*James Lane Allen: “The Doctor’s Christmas Eve.” Page 101.

chens and the dining-rooms, and the convalescent wards and the operating-rooms, and the children's quarters, and the rooms where the X-ray photographs are made and developed, and the radium laboratories; what wonderful skill has the modern physician developed, and how marvelous have our hospitals become! If people knew more just how great was the service rendered to the community by the hospitals, there would not be so frequent a story of deficits. And the churches ought always to be especially interested in hospitals, for they should share the compassion of the founder of the church for physical suffering.

I would not say that hospitals originated with Christianity, for I know that while buildings which served the functions both of a hospice and a hospital existed in the later days of Pagan Rome, the first building which ought properly to be called a hospital originated not with Christians but with Moslems and was founded by the Arabs at Cordova about the time when they first penetrated into Spain. Indeed, modern medicine owes much more than it may realize to the work of the Arab physicians who were the great doctors of their day. Those who are familiar with Sir Walter Scott's "Talisman" will remember the unusual knowledge of drugs possessed by the Saracens, and indeed if any care to trace the course of vaccination, it will take them back into Turkey where inoculation was practised long before it was introduced into Europe by Lady Mary Montagu in the eighteenth century.

But for all that Christianity has been particularly zealous concerning hospitals, and the modern hospital may probably be claimed as the child of the Christian Church, and the Church has never completely forgotten that Jesus Christ was a Great Phy-

sician as well as a Great Revealer. Because the church does not indulge in divine healing, it has not forgotten the Christlike commission to heal the sick. Because we give place to the physician, we are not betraying the commands and injunctions of our Master. When the criticism is made that we have neglected the art of healing, we need only point to the thousands of church hospitals in the world, we need only point to that glorious work attempted by medical missions, we need only ask what is to be said of a man like Grenfell of Labrador, we need only refer to the work carried on by the Christian churches among the lepers of the world, of whom according to a recent report from India there are about a million, we need only mention the devotion and sacrifice of such a man as Father Damien of Molukai, we need only stress the large number of medical schools and colleges established and sustained, largely or entirely, directly or indirectly, by members of Christian churches. The church still believes in the admonition of Christ and seeks to heal the sick.

There has always been an intimate connection between religion and medicine. In the most primitive times, the centre of the village community was a witch-doctor, who combined in himself the role of priest and physician. While he used some curious natural remedies, he made much of supernatural means, especially incantations of a wierd and ghastly character. And yet the incantations may have done good; what, after all, is the reading of Mary Baker Eddy's "Science and Health" to a distraught person who thinks he is suffering but the utilization of a sort of incantation, a reversion to primitive medicine?

And if we care to study the inner conditions of the Roman Empire in the second century of our own era,

we shall discover the very closest relationship between religion and medicine. In the religion of Isis which thrived everywhere, much of the power in that faith was due to the reputed healing potentialities of Queen Isis, and the same is true of Serapis. There was, too, a great revival of the worship of the god, Asclepius, the God of health, and his temples were to be found everywhere. Dill tells us that they were "generally built with an eye to the beauty of scenery or the virtues of some clear, cold ancient spring, or other health-giving powers in the site which might reinforce the more mysterious influence of religion."* When the wealthy people of that day were worn out after their summer vacations, they would visit one of these temples of healing and seek the ministrations of the men who were at once physicians and priests. Much attention was paid to the diet, to fresh air, the dormitories of the temple being exposed to the south where all the Mediterranean breezes could be felt; patients were subjected to much bathing in natural medicated waters and of course were given certain herbs supposed to contain medicinal properties. But with all this, a spiritual ministry was added. Much of the physical disease of the time was rooted in moral disorder, and for "such troubled, tainted souls, the bright cheerfulness, the orderly calm and confidence of a ritual was provided." Listen if you will to this description: "after certain offerings and rites, the sufferer took his place in the long dormitory which often contained beds for 200 or 300 persons with windows open all night to the winds of the south. The sick man brought his bed coverings, and made his gift upon the altar. The lamps were lighted in the long

*Dill: "Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius." Page 460. See also Osler, "The Evolution of Modern Medicine." Pages 49—58.

gallery, a priest recited the vesper prayers. At a later hour, the lights were extinguished, strict silence was enjoined and a hope expressed for some soothing vision from above was left as a parting gift or salutation by the minister as he retired". Dill also tells us that just as the patient was dropping off to sleep, through a sliding panel, hidden in the wall, a dim figure of gracious aspect might glide to the side of his couch and whisper strange sweet words of comfort. Thus you see that these temples of healing were in a curious way a combination of church and hospital and not unlike our sanatoria. The ancients knew something of auto-suggestion and other psychotherapeutic means, although they may not have developed the imposing terminology of our day. Religion and medicine were however co-ordinated.

In the middle ages many cures were attributed to holy relics and to spiritual and supernatural causation. It is perhaps rash to dismiss the whole fabric of stories which have come down to us as baseless legend; it is at least fair to say that the faith which brought many a racked body to holy places reputed for healing powers did effect a composure of soul, if not a saving adjustment of the entire nervous system.* However that may be, the supremely great

*On the very day when this sermon was preached, the following despatch was sent from Paris to certain American papers, and suggests the nature of some of the cures ascribed to religion: Paris, July 23.—A paralytic cripple on a train of pilgrims going to Loudres has not been obliged to wait for a cure at the miraculous well. His cure was effected by an express train.

At the Dijon depot, with a number of the party, he was partaking of refreshment at the railroad restaurant, when a bell suddenly rang announcing the departure of the pilgrim train. Hobbling slowly across the track, the cripple saw a fast train bearing down on him. A cry of horror rose among the spectators. But the cripple dropped his crutches and raced to safety. Fear had cured him.

foreign missionaries today are the men who go with a gospel in one hand and a scalpel in the other, who heal men's bodies as they heal men's souls. And I suspect that in the church of tomorrow, on the staff of every church will be a physician, a specialist in the physical basis of health, working in the heartiest co-operation with the priests, the specialists in the spiritual basis of health.

— And if that time comes, I believe that such sects as Christian Science will vanish away and take their errors with them. For after all, Christian Science is primarily a protest, and in spite of all the undoubted good which it does, it is only an exaggerated protest at that. If it has vogue today, it is because the medical science of the last fifty years has been more concerned with physical phenomena and is only now coming to recognize the great importance of mental and psychic phenomena. The source of many diseases may perhaps be traced to a disordered mind, to retarded development, to undue repression of some of the vital instincts, or to too great indulgence in some of the good things of life. And the physician of tomorrow must be a psychopath and a student of the soul as well as a physiologist with a knowledge of anatomy and materia medica and "the glands governing personality!"

And yet with the clear recognition of the place of the spiritual in healing, let us refuse to be carried away by the follies of Christian Science to which too many good people become addicted, attracted by its virtues and yet not adroit enough to understand its perils or to see through its glaring fallacies and sophistries.

Christian Science is philosophically absurd. It attempts to explain away evil in the world, by express-

ing it in terms of negation or illusion. Christian Science is a combination of the most obvious defects in Platonism, the idealism of Berkeley and the ancient Indian doctrine of Maya or illusion. It practically amounts to a denial of the real world, which has no existence in itself. All the ugly facts of life—sin, disease, sickness, death,—in short everything short of God are non-existent, and if they seem to exist, it is because of illusion and error. But to what are the illusion and the error due? They are due to mortal mind. But what is mortal mind? Has it any real existence or is it in its turn due to illusion? Here the Christian scientist is impaled on one of the horns of a dilemma.* If he says that mortal mind does exist, you have him for then he admits the existence of one perverse reality in life which creates illusions. If he says that it does not exist, then again you have him for how can something which does not exist create illusions? It is absurd. Instead of being a philosophical novelty, Christian science is an ancient philosophical heresy, and the result of the old quarrel between the idealists and the realists, the noumenal and the phenomenal.

Christian Science further may be dangerous. It often deliberately shuts its eyes to well-established facts of science. Some time ago a child of Christian Science parents died in New Jersey of a malignant form of diphtheria. The night before the child died, the parents took her to a theatre where there were hundreds of people. She must have been full of diphtheria germs at the time and possibly spread the disease to many, or if she did not it was only the most fortunate of chances. Those parents were guilty of

*Swain, Richard L.: "The Real Key to Christian Science" is a masterly exposure of fraudulent thinking.

criminal negligence, and yet it is almost impossible to convict such simpletons and criminals because of the argument of freedom of conscience, and religious liberty. But have these people a right to imperil the lives of your children and mine, simply because they refuse to accept the fully demonstrated results of science and prefer to consider the devoted work of that servant of God—Louis Pasteur, one of the most glorious men of the last century—as entirely unnecessary and silly? I say that I have a right to insist that if such persons intend to practise a dangerous belief which imperils the health and life of my children they ought to be compelled to practise it by themselves on some desert island.

Christian Science is not really and truly Christian, at least in the historical sense. For at the heart of Christianity there is a cross, an inescapable cross. And the cross spells suffering and endurance of pain, not the gentle belief that suffering and pain do not exist but are only negative. Christ came to teach us how to endure pain, not how to escape it. He came to take away sin, not to explain it away. And the only way to life is the way of the cross, at least in the Christian sense, and I see no place for a real and satisfying conception of the Cross in the dogmas of Christian Science.

But Christian Science is to me unforgivable when it sneers at the medical profession, and disobeys the command of the book of Ecclesiasticus to honor a physician with the honor which is due unto him. Physicians have their weaknesses, God knows! They are sensitive as most humans. They may sometimes be more interested in their incomes than in their work, but that is not a peculiarity of physicians and there is no group of men in the world who do more work

among the poor and indigent for nothing than these same physicians who do not hesitate to charge the rich. They know well that many diseases have not yet yielded their secret to their studies. But for all that, the physicians are among the most consecrated of the professional men of today and woe unto the community which is without them. Their devotion to their science, their interest in human beings as human beings, their wide sympathies with the frailties and weaknesses of men should not be overlooked.

I am thinking this morning of one of my teachers. He taught me science in high school; he was an eccentric chap with no capacity for discipline; and some of us made his life miserable. He eventually gave up teaching and went into medicine. He began original research. He thought that he had discovered a serum for a very deadly disease, and in order to try it out, he wanted to inoculate a human being with the disease and then try the serum. He inoculated himself. The serum was not what he had hoped, and he died, a martyr to science. If you place in one scale all the books of Mary Baker Eddy and in the other pan of the scale that single deed of devotion and heroism, "Science and Health" will kiss the stars!

I am thinking of Dr. William Henry Drummond, one of the great physicians and humans of Montreal. He was fond of dogs and thought a man must be pretty mean if he would not give a pup to a friend. He was well-to-do but called out at all hours of the day and night to minister to the poor and the sick, and he had a very general habit of always forgetting to send bills. In his leisure moments, his great love for men led him to write a few books of verse "The Habitant", "Johnny Courteau", "The Voyageur", "The Great Fight"; incidentally he lectured at

McGill University. And one day he went on a trip to Cobalt and contracted typhoid, and came back in a long box to a city of broken hearts. But if you place "Science and Health" in one pan of a scale and "Leetel Bateese" in the other, "Science and Health" will kiss the stars! One is human and the other isn't.

There was a graduate of my own university, who became in the northern dominion a great physician, an authority on the diseases of the kidney and a writer on medical subjects. He went out to help his country on the battlefields of France, and the wounded boys that passed under his care had reason to bless his skill and his tenderness. And the old gift of song for which he was well-known returned, and one day he wrote a little poem and sent it to "Punch". It was called "In Flanders Field".

"In Flanders Field, the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row"

I do not need to recite it. You know it. Everybody knows it. It came out of a great heart, out of the heart of a physician. It was the premier poem of the war. And then one day far overseas John MacRae laid him down and died, and his whole country mourned as for a friend who had gone. And if you put "Science and Health" in one side of the scale, and the deep humanity of "In Flanders Field" on the other side of the scale, "Science and Health" will kiss the stars!

And yet Christian Science is right when it emphasizes the ministry to the disordered mind and soul. The true physician will do this. He will get at the fountain of the spiritual life, in the deeper recesses of the mind and he will see to it that good thoughts and noble motives and strong wills and great hopes keep the spirit wholesome lest the body droop. Calling one day on a physician whose office faced the Mother Eddy

Church in Boston, he asked me why it was that so many people crowded into that church on successive Wednesday nights and Sundays, and he answered his own question: "I believe that it is because Christian Science offers a gospel of faith, hope and joy." We all know the old Latin legend "*Mens sana in corpore sano*", but we have been prone to repeat it as if the soundness of mind was due to the soundness of body. To-day, we know that soundness of mind may create soundness of body. In the chapter dealing with "The Body Machine and Its Work" in "The Outline of Science" we read: "The researches of Pavlov, Cannon, Carlson and Crile have made it quite clear that pleasant emotions favour the secretion of the digestive juices..... On the other hand unpleasant emotions such as envy, and mental disturbances, such as worry, hinder digestion and the smooth working of the nutritive processes..... The influence of mind on body finds a good illustration in the stimulation of the adrenal glands by strong emotion." Prof. J. Arthur Thomson says "There are facts which point to the conclusion that a gladsome mind increases the efficiency of the nervous system. Good tidings will invigorate the flagging energies of a band of explorers; an unexpected visit will change a wearied homesick child, as if by magic, into a dancing gladsome elf; a religious joy enables men and women to transcend the limits of frail humanity". In the highest form of ministry to the sick, there must be the diagnosis of the soul as well as the diagnosis of the body, and "physiology and psychology must join hands—as is suggested, indeed, by the name of the new science of psycho-biology".*

*Arthur Thomson: "The Outline of Science." Vol. 2, page 360.

The true physician works with God and can not afford to ignore the spiritual. He also prays unto the Lord that he would prosper that which he gives for ease and remedy to prolong life, and he does the little he can and leaves nature to work the cure. Leaves nature, yes, and leaves God! For it is God who healeth all our diseases. Unless the physician bring God to his task, his task is but half-done or not done at all. If he does that, however, he is indeed like unto the Celestial Surgeon, of whom Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, and who felt it to be the unforgivable sin not to radiate joy and gladness:

“If I have faltered more or less,
In my great task of happiness,
If I have moved among my race,
And shown no glorious morning face;
If beams from happy human eyes
Have moved me not, if not clear skies,
Books and my food and summer rain
Knocked at my sullen heart in vain;
Lord, Thy most pointed pleasure take,
And stab my spirit broad awake;
Or Lord, if more obdurate I,
Take thou before that spirit die
Some crushing pain, some killing sin,
And to my dead heart run them in”.

Let us honour the physician who goes about his task with a morning face, who offers to the sick and weak of body the healing remedy, and to the distraught soul the presence of God who is the health of our countenance and our God.

